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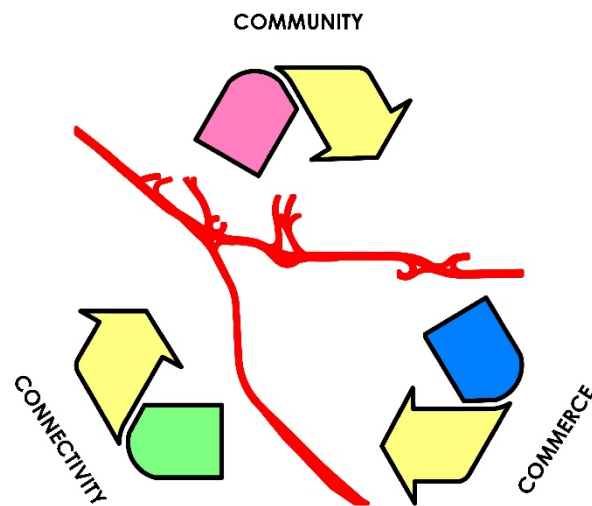
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Framework To A Design Solution For Downtown Buffalo, NY



By

Robert J. Sulli

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Architecture

Department of Architecture – Golisano Institute for Sustainability

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York
Summer 2020

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ABSTRACT

Downtown Buffalo, New York is on the verge of a design recovery. Despite once being celebrated for its architectural and engineering achievements of the 1800s, Buffalo spent the near century that followed in a downward trend. Contemporarily considered a forgotten city of the industrial era, it now sits at the precipice of a new beginning. Around the 1980s, a series of investment studies produced reports outlining the different ways downtown Buffalo was struggling. Whether it was measured by loss of residential population, corporate headquarters leaving town, or just general urban decay, Buffalo had been exhibiting all the symptoms of a dying city for decades. Its last real growth period spanned from the 1920s to the 1950s, peaking at around 580k residents. In the period of decline that followed, Buffalo lost nearly 55% of its population in the blink of an eye¹. It now sits under 10k residents, and the question is, what is the connection between a declining population and a built environment?

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the existing points of disconnection between Buffalo's harbor and its center city, which are two nodes of potential, then define a series of solutions that can provide the most opportunity for sustainable regrowth from the inside out. The goal is to inhibit the prosperity of downtown Buffalo economically and aesthetically - but most importantly, functionally. The design will be a framework for which future developments can fit into seamlessly. Robust and vibrant new veins through holes in the urban fabric, such as empty lots, surface parking, and unsightly highway overpasses, will be the emphasis of this proposal. The focal point of the design will be a revised Sports and Entertainment District with entirely new city blocks surrounding a new downtown football stadium for the NFL's Buffalo Bills. Growth will stem from the Cobblestone District and reach outward beyond the I-190 overpass, back into the original Joseph Ellicott plan. The design is a three-pronged approach that will address connectivity, residential blocks, and commercial growth -- all of which are staples of a healthy, sustainable downtown.

¹ Eduard L. Glaeser, *Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?*, City Journal - Economy, Finance, and Budgets, 2007

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i. INTRODUCTION

Through a survey from a 2015 report on the state of the city², a list of challenges agreed-upon by the community were described as:

- Lack of connectivity
- Uncompromising hardscape barriers
- Lack of amenities
- Inadequate wayfinding
- Too much surface parking
- Not enough accommodation for bicycles or pedestrians.

Overall, the consensus seemed to be that, from a planning standpoint, the city is generally uninviting and disconnected. However, in the short time since the 2015 report came out, a new series of initiatives have illuminated a city that is potentially on the rebound. A 2018 market study³ found that since 2011 approximately 2k new residents have moved into downtown Buffalo - a 10.6% increase over that span. While a far cry from its heyday of 580k, it is a 180-degree turnaround in less than a decade. In conjunction with these findings, a number of private developments like the Harborcenter and the Labatt Brew House have made it apparent that the area is again viewed as viable. A 2016 development guide⁴ took the initiative to highlight specific areas targeted for future endeavors and paved the way for what should be a series of momentum steps in the right direction. Two areas that lack the most connection are the Sports and Entertainment District, and the Theater/Upper Main District.

Like many industrial-era cities, Buffalo, New York has been through several phases of development and urban planning. Beginning with Joseph Ellicott's radial plan in 1804, downtown Buffalo began to lay its roots as a uniquely designed and aesthetically interesting urban metropolis. Following Ellicott's lead, in 1868, Frederick Olmsed set out to expand the radial plan into a unique system of parks and greenways. As Robert Shibley of the University at Buffalo put it, "*the father of landscape architecture came to Buffalo with an invitation to put a park in the city, decided instead that the real thing to do is put the city in a park.*"⁵ Widely celebrated, these early endeavors into urban development put Downtown Buffalo on the map. However, as time passed, and as the industrial era gave way to the major highway era, along with post-war suburban sprawl, Buffalo, like many metropolitan areas of the northeast, began to fall by the wayside.

² Fisher Associates, *Downtown Buffalo Infrastructure and Public Realm Master Plan*, 2015, P. 7

³ Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo: Looking Ahead With A Clearer View*, 2018, P. 6

⁴ *Downtown Buffalo, NY 2016 Development Guide*, Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, 2016

⁵ *Buffalo: America's Best Designed City*, (Clip), Visit Buffalo Niagara Foundation, 2013

Racial redlining was one of the first cracks to form in the city, starting what would become decades-long destruction of its historic communities. This was followed by the installment of a new highway system in the 1950's, as part of the 1956 *Federal Highway Act*.⁶ Often drawing comparisons to Robert Moses' controversial parkways, the highways splintered Ellicott's radial design and disconnected Olmsted's greenways from the neighborhoods they were intended to serve. These highways, often cited in conjunction with racial segregation, stand to this day as the greatest mistake the city ever made.

*"The urban renewal movement of the 1950s-70s changed the physical landscape of American cities, often resulting in the demolition of buildings and the construction of highways. Politicians and planners often used the framework of urban renewal to justify displacing entire neighborhoods - primarily impacting communities of color."*⁷

Steps taken in the 1970s were thought, at the time, to be in the right direction. In 1971 a new *Buffalo Master Plan* was put forth, followed by formal desegregation in 1976. Unfortunately, these mid-century efforts to curtail the devastation the highway system caused fell short, and did not address the deeper issue of destruction and disconnection of the city's historic communities. By the 2000s it was clear that Buffalo needed new ideas. Initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s brought a plethora of issues to the public eye. With cooperation between the city, special interest groups, and the University at Buffalo's Architecture and Planning department, several initiatives began to take form.

In 2003, a decades-long report, *Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo* was finished. It set in motion what would become a flurry of deep studies and directive reports over the following years, with an ever-present eye on resolving the highway system someday.

*"Making Downtown whole means finding ways to connect the strategic investment areas and residential focus areas with each other and with the inner ring of the neighborhoods, the waterfront, and the rest of the city. The Queen City Hub envisions a series of gateways and 'great streets' built on the framework of the radial and grid system. Such 'great streets' should put the pedestrian first, calm traffic, and improve the urban environment to connect investment areas, support residential development and retail, and link Downtown to neighborhoods and waterfront."*⁸

In 2012 the *Buffalo Building Reuse Report* came out, then in 2013 the *Complete Streets* report was written. Many of these reports included direct communication with residents, or would-be residents. Part of

⁶ Alana Semuels, *Highways Destroyed America's Cities: Can Tearing Them Down Bring Revitalization?*, The Atlantic, 2015

⁷ Anna Blatto, *A City Divided: A Brief History of Segregation in Buffalo*, Partnership For The Public Good, 2018

⁸ The City Of Buffalo, *Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo*, Vol. 1 P. 9, 2003

this cooperation between policy makers and the residents themselves is an intent to formulate guidelines for would-be investors to adhere to.

“The Complete Streets Summit was an overwhelming success. There were a total of 173 attendees for the public forum and 67 attendees for the invite only Policy Makers Summit. An evaluation was sent to all participants that attended the public forum and policy maker components of the two-day symposium. The complete evaluation report [is now available and] some highlights include:

- *38% of public forum participants were interested citizens*
- *More than 50% respondents thought Complete Streets is an excellent opportunity to create jobs*
- *A discussion on the specific issues, knowledgeable panelists, structure of the program and fact that such an event was organized in the city was appreciated*
- *96% of the respondents would like to attend future forums on this topic”⁹*

In 2015, a brand-new *Downtown Buffalo Infrastructure and Master Plan* was released, bringing the city’s checkered urban design history full circle. This report described Buffalo as “*experiencing challenges to reaching its full potential, including identifying innovative solutions to encourage and support ongoing downtown reinvestment.*”¹⁰ In 2016, the *Green Code* was written and released alongside the comprehensive development guide for investment¹¹.

“Through the Green Code, [Buffalo] is reforming the policies and regulations guiding the city’s physical development. The project includes the first citywide land use plan since 1977, and the first comprehensive zoning rewrite since 1953. These outdated regulations will soon be removed and replaced by regulations [for] a Unified Development Ordinance embracing Buffalo’s walkable, green neighborhoods.”¹²

In 2018, a housing market study was released, pointing to a potential turnaround from what had been decades of residential decline and loss of commerce¹³. Meanwhile, private investments into the urban fabric of certain neighborhoods had been re-sewing downtown piece by piece for years, proving that new development was possible. These private investors brought new sports facilities, hotels, parks, restaurants, and with the help of the city, they put cars back alongside the light rail system of the once desolate main street corridor.

With this rejuvenation comes bigger ideas about the city getting back to its roots; better connectivity, increased commerce, and new residents once again flocking to downtown neighborhoods. The question

⁹ Justin S. Booth, *Buffalo Complete Streets: Working Hard to Bring Complete Streets to Buffalo*, P. 12, 2013

¹⁰ Fisher Associates, *Downtown Buffalo Infrastructure and Public Realm Master Plan*, 2015, P. 2

¹¹ Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo, NY 2016 Development Guide*, 2016

¹² Justin S. Booth, *Buffalo Complete Streets: Working Hard to Bring Complete Streets to Buffalo*, P. 15, 2013

¹³ Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo: Looking Ahead With A Clearer View*

about downtown Buffalo has changed from 'how' to 'how far' the city is willing to go to get back to where it started. Several new investment opportunities are on the horizon, such as the prospect of a new downtown football stadium for the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

ii. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Buffalo's once lauded 19th century urban design, which subsequently fell into a state of decay after a series of destructive decisions in the 20th century, requires an array of new and thoughtful designs, not only to adapt it back to its original vision, but to improve on it for a modernized and sustainable revision. Over recent years, with progress in analyzing the specific needs of the city, specific nodes, neighborhoods, and connections that are in most need of rehabilitation have been identified. One of the main focuses, as a part of reconnecting the harbor to the city center, is infilling the areas south of the I-190 overpass with new developments - specifically the property in and around the Cobblestone District.

Two main hubs that have maintained centers of activity throughout the decades are the Sports and Entertainment District along the harbor, and the Theater/Upper Main District beyond the overpass to its north. These areas have long been disjointed, in part from a lack of thru-traffic of all types. The overpasses create physical and visual boundaries between these two major nodes of downtown. Despite being a destination for sports and entertainment, these hardscape barriers are an uncompromising deterrent for through traffic. In fact, the highways themselves offer incentive to pass right on by the harbor - as was their intention. The overpasses have had a lasting impact on the areas abandoned to their south. Historical neighborhoods were destroyed, and the negative effects radiated out, affecting the entirety of Downtown Buffalo in one way or another. The highways were invasive at their outset, and remain invasive to this day.

When the community speaks of inadequate wayfinding, lack of connectivity, uncompromising hardscape barriers, and too much surface parking as their prime concerns it is difficult not to visualize the I-190 overpass and the area just south of it. Outlined in detail by the *Downtown Buffalo Infrastructure and Public Realm Master Plan*¹⁴ the design objectives for the Sports and Entertainment District include:

- Introducing new through streets where surface parking currently exists
- Improving existing streetscapes
- Adding new bike and pedestrian ways
- Redistributing existing parking once surface lots are converted for new use

The plan also outlines specific objectives for all adjacent areas, giving would-be investors and designers a framework for holistic integration into the community. A specific yet essential component of addressing this connectivity issue is re-envisioning the streets and pedestrian ways which go beneath the I-190 overpasses. Identified as an individual component of improvement, these must be considered in conjunction with any other improvement to adjacent areas. In addition to these objectives, there must also be consideration for

¹⁴ Fisher Associates, *Downtown Buffalo Infrastructure and Public Realm Master Plan*, 2015, Appx. A, Sec. 25

new residential and commercial spaces throughout all areas, as is outlined in the 2016 *Downtown Buffalo Development Guide*¹⁵ and the 2018 *Downtown Buffalo Housing Market Study*.

*“Downtown is healthy, but we need to continue to support the market...we need to identify new strategies, initiatives, and projects to drive growth...major new public projects and economic development anchors must be considered and designed in the context of stimulating a revitalized market.”*¹⁶

¹⁵ Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo, NY 2016 Development Guide*, 2016

¹⁶ Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo: Looking Ahead With A Clearer View*, 2018, P. 10

iii. PROJECT MISSION

This project is meant to propose a multifaceted supplemental plan that will improve the built environment and the associated walkable experience of downtown Buffalo, specifically between the center city and the harbor. The goal is to promote organic and sustainable economic growth within the community by reconnecting commercial areas that are currently separated by hardscape barriers, such as the I-190 overpass and the sea of surface adjacent. This will essentially be a two-prong attack on the problems of Downtown Buffalo. The first prong will be addressing the disconnection of the two most distinct and frequented commercial areas of the city: the Sports and Entertainment District and the Theater/Upper Main District. The second prong will be proposing a new football stadium to be the beating heart of an expanded Sports and Entertainment District. The focus will be creating opportunities for infill between the Sports and Entertainment District and the Theater/Upper-Main District, with special focus on creating options for how to address the highways and parking lots. I intend to study the existing fabric of the urban interface to distinguish the functionality and relationships between the existing urban-form components. This type of analysis can be understood, in part, through the examples set forth in *The Anatomy of Sprawl* by Brenda Case Scheer, which include:

- **Site:** landform, bodies of water, and vegetation
- **Superstructure:** historic paths, land boundaries, and highways
- **Infill:** contemporary connections between the built environment
- **Buildings:** habitable structures and bridges
- **Objects:** manmade objects, cultivated greenscape, parking, and underground infrastructure¹⁷

For the purpose of this thesis, consideration of the 'site' and 'superstructure' of Downtown Buffalo is essential to the solution. Although water is a somewhat peripheral element of the area, reintegration of access to the waterways is a part of this proposal. Likewise, because part of the solution is to address the problematic highways and how they've interfered with the historic Ellicott plan, consideration for how the superstructure can be reworked will be essential. Infill, buildings, and objects will be a secondary consideration for the proposal, with only general ideas about how to address the existing buildings or how to propose new ones.

"It is possible to interpret the layers of the city as a rich collage of interaction between the way the city was and the way it is today. The relatively static layers represent, in a tangible, physical way, the city's history

¹⁷ Brenda Case Scheer, *The Anatomy Of Sprawl*, University of California, 2001, P. 30

and an intense relationship with the land. More ephemeral layers reflect more immediate activities and ideas.¹⁸

- *Brenda Case Scheer*

The Sports and Entertainment District is a location rich with opportunity to ignite outward growth of Downtown Buffalo, and I will focus on the most problematic element in the area: the highway. I will do this by defining a strategy to reconnect the areas to the highway's north and south. Part of this strategy is designing entirely new paths and roadways, with mixed-use buildings along them, to tie back into the original Joseph Ellicott radial plan. The focal point of the proposal, and epicenter of future growth, will be a new football stadium for the Buffalo Bills.

Using precedent set by similar projects in other cities, this addition to the Sports and Entertainment District should be a holistic urban design that includes consideration for how it will attract new residents to this area of Buffalo. The goal is to generate a master plan for the area that is logical, believable, a framework to follow in the event that a project like this can someday be realized. The total solution will include a number of new mixed-use buildings, along a set of proposed new streets and pathways, to increase the presence of commercial and residential tenants. While the epicenter of the project will be the stadium, how it anchors the surrounding areas of mixed-use buildings is the full vision of the project.

¹⁸ Brenda Case Scheer, *The Anatomy Of Sprawl*, University of California, 2001, P. 30 & 31

IV. PROJECT BACKGROUND

A project of this magnitude would no-doubt be an exciting - albeit controversial - proposal, however, the idea is not entirely foreign to the city of Buffalo. For decades, it seems, Buffalonians have questioned the vitality of the current home of the Buffalo Bills in Orchard Park - a 20-minute drive from Downtown Buffalo. There has been a growing curiosity within the Buffalo community about how a downtown Bills stadium would fare. One of the more most intriguing but less important questions is how well a downtown stadium could serve the needs of a fanbase that has grown accustomed to 'tailgating' in the large parking lots of New Era Field. Likewise, push back from the community of Orchard Park is to be expected, so consideration for the businesses that currently rely on football games throughout the NFL season for survival is imperative.

Questions about the viability of a downtown stadium have been as omnipresent in the discourse of NFL media in general, as doubts about the vitality of the existing Orchard Park stadium have come to the forefront of the discussion. A lingering question about whether such a massive undertaking would be worth it for taxpayers, echoes from broader concern about how projects like this are funded. Even if the billionaire Pegula family that currently owns the Bills could afford to fund the entire project, it is likely that they would still seek financial aid from the government in one form or another. This question of whether the public should have a stake in the construction of a new facility that serves a team owned and operated by a private entity is a long standing one.

*"According to a 2017 poll of economists, 83 percent surveyed said "providing any new state and local subsidies to build stadiums...is likely to cost the relevant taxpayers more than any local economic benefit guaranteed." In the last half-century, stadiums have typically been heavily financed by public subsidies: a 2016 Brookings Institution study found that the \$28 billion price tag to construct or renovate professional sports stadiums between 2000 and 2014 relied on \$13 billion in publicly financed, tax-exempt bonds..."There are an awful lot of economic studies that have tried to find stadiums and arenas that have repaid the public for nine-figure construction costs, and it's never happened," says Neil deMause, a journalist who runs the Field of Schemes blog and has spent more than a decade covering stadium development deals. "Let's say it's a high bar to clear."*¹⁹

An article by *Buffalo Rising*,²⁰ outlines how such a project is currently undergoing a feasibility study, being conducted by HVS Consulting, at the behest of Buffalo Bills ownership. According to a separate article by John Wawrow of the *Associated Press*, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo commissioned AECOM to conduct a similar feasibility study in 2014. The 2014 study was meant to discover viable sites in the event that the Buffalo Bills decided to relocate, once their lease ended in Orchard Park - where they

¹⁹ Patrick Sisson, *Can Stadiums Save Downtowns - And Be Good Deals For Cities?*, Curbed, 2018

²⁰ Author Unknown, *Cobblestone Preferred Site of New Stadium?*, Buffalo Rising, 2018

currently play. The lease runs through 2023, with an out-clause in 2020.²¹ It is believed that the Cobblestone District (shown below) has been identified in both studies as an ideal site for a new stadium, and it is believed to be one of the preferred locations of the Pegulas.



(Image courtesy of Google Earth)

Kim and Terry Pegula not only own the Buffalo Bills and the Buffalo Sabres, but they have also invested a considerable amount of money into developing the areas around the Cobblestone District. The Sabres, coincidentally, play their home games at the Keybank Center, which sits just west of the Cobblestone District, and is connected at its north to the Pegulas' most recent development, the Harborcenter, which is a mixed-use sports facility that has a commercially zoned ground level. The Pegulas seem poised to reshape Buffalo on their own, but it will not be without help from the community, as has been the case with most developers of this type. The Pegulas have expressed awareness of the sensitivity to relocating the Buffalo Bills from their longtime home at New Era Field in Orchard Park, which is why they chose to honor the full length of their current lease, instead of using the opt-out clause of 2020. Projects like this don't come with ease, and they typically encounter a series of interventions from members of the communities that they intend to serve. In terms of downtown stadiums alone, there is precedent for both success and failure, but when such a proposal to relocate a team's home stadium is coupled with a proposal to introduce entirely new city blocks, there are fewer examples to consider.

There was a trend from the 1960s through the 1990s of building new stadiums and arenas in suburban areas where they could be easily flanked by dedicated surface parking - something downtown facilities do not generally offer. Nowadays, stadiums and arenas that are proposed as standalone

²¹ John Wawrow, *Buffalo Bills' Stadium Plans Inch Forward to Forefront of Discussion*, Associated Press, 2018

developments, like those of the past, seem to have the least support in general. A reason for this could be the lessons learned over the last 50 years. As the facilities themselves have fallen out of date, the areas around them have not developed into much more than surface parking and the occasional strip mall. The stadium projects which offer more to the community than simply a venue for sports are generally more supported these days. This is likely because of the success many new projects have seen over recent years. Once the communities around these facilities see the ways it can become an asset to sustaining economic and social viability, early skepticism tends to subside. This is the reason why I have chosen to take such an expanded approach to solving the hardships of Downtown Buffalo.

*"We all want the Buffalo Bills to continue to be in Buffalo, to be successful. A stadium that is going to be competitive with other stadiums around the league is going to be important in that context, and I think everyone is committed to that, whether it's a new significant renovation or whether it's a completely new facility in a new location. Those are the things that I think the group has to settle collectively and address over the next several months, if not sooner."*²²

- Roger Goodell, January 2020

The new movement is being described as a renaissance to reverse the mistakes of the 1950s. Part of the solution is the cooperation between team owners and the communities themselves. In the past, team owners would pressure communities into giving big public investments to secure the team in the preferred location. As noted, these facilities tended to land in more peripheral, suburban areas, and lessons have been learned from that practice.

When calculating the potential gains of a project like this, it is important to factor in the potentially detrimental losses of underlying assets. Because surface parking is a target for removal as a part of this project there needs to be consideration for where the displaced parking will go. This issue was raised for downtown Buffalo in the past when other developers ran into this exact issue. According to an investigative report by Geoff Kelly, in 2019 Rocco Termini - the president of a development agency - sued Ciminelli Development, a competitor, over a project that was in effect removing upwards of 400 parking spaces. The suit was filed because the parking slated for removal directly served a separate Termini-owned development.

"The city acquired the property by use of eminent domain, during the so-called "urban renewal" movement in the early 1960s. The city knocked down existing structures, displacing existing small businesses, and built the parking lot, which it deemed a "public good." All this cost the city about \$1.4 million, financed by the sale of municipal bonds. Termini's lawyers argue that, because the city purchased and developed the property under those terms, to provide parking as a public good, it cannot so easily slough off the loss of

²² Roger Goodell, NFL Commissioner - VIA WGRZ, 2020

*that parking. The city must replace the public good for which it exercised eminent domain and borrowed money. The city's lawyers counter that the property has been a surface parking lot for 20 years longer than was anticipated when it was acquired, and now the city should feel free to have it developed in any way that the city determines is a current benefit."*²³

This dispute was settled when Termini dropped the suit and the project was able to move forward in 2020. This sets somewhat of a precedent for an argument that may arise if the Cobblestone District surface parking is slated for complete removal. As it stands, the lots are generally used as overflow parking for large events in the area, such as Sabres games and concerts. Only a small portion serves the demand of the surrounding businesses on a day to day basis. This raises the question, however, of how to deal with the massive increase in demand on parking if a new stadium is built.

What many downtown sports facilities have turned to is underground parking garages, or integrated parking garages as part of the facilities themselves. In fact, the Pegula-owned Harborcenter is about one-third parking garage. The other two-thirds are a sports facility and a hotel. Other facilities have offered only essential parking for handicap spaces and workers, opting for the 'use public transportation' approach. If there was a silver lining to the I-190 overpasses in Downtown Buffalo, it would be that they afford space that can essentially only be used for parking. Ideally, there would be a combination of new parking integrated into the new stadium, new parking integrated into the new buildings that surround it, and a plan for public transportation worked into it.

Fortunately, there have been ongoing discussions about expanding the light-rail system in Downtown Buffalo. It currently ends its route at the foot of Keybank Center, but proposals have been made to extend service beyond, and also to add completely new lines. As recently as March 2020, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority was addressing said proposals and assessing the viability of such a project.

*"The comment period for the Metro Rail Expansion Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is now closed. The NFTA will incorporate and address comments received from the public, agencies, and stakeholders during the 60-day comment period, as well as the analysis presented in the Draft EIS, to prepare a Final EIS, which is scheduled to be released this summer."*²⁴

Addressing the highway is the most important part of this project, because even if all the empty space around it is effectively converted into bustling new city blocks, there would still be a lack of connection to the center city. So where does the city of Buffalo stand on dealing with it? The answer is difficult to find because there are so many conflicting opinions about the prospect of removing any or all of the downtown

²³ Geoff Kelly, *A Problematic Downtown Development Project*, Investigative Post, 2019

²⁴ NFTA-Metro, *Metro Rail Expansion Project*, www.nftametrorailexpansion.com, 2020

highway system. The 2003 *Queen City Hub* offered insight into the topic, in conjunction with its objective to reconnect the waterfront to Downtown.

*"It has been proposed to 'cut and cover' portions of the Niagara Thruway (I-190) to reconnect Downtown to the waterfront. An alternative to this proposal would rebuild the Thruway as a low-speed parkway with multiple intersections and pedestrian crossings. Impacts on commercial truck traffic, Amtrak rail service, and overall highway capacity would need to be considered. A third option would include a combination of cut and cover and at grade boulevard. Estimated costs range from \$700 million to \$1.2 billion depending on how and where the deck is constructed."*²⁵

The easy solution would be a dress-up project, where the streets that run beneath the overpasses are given a makeover to seem more inviting. This type of band-aid solution could be achieved by stitching together guidelines put forth in both the *Buffalo Green Code* and the *Buffalo Complete Streets report*. However, the most effective and long-lasting solution would clearly be a complete removal of the downtown routes. Whether that be re-routing through a different area completely, or disbursing traffic through various city blocks, cutting out the bulky system seems to be the best solution. In fact, downtown highway removal is becoming something of a modern practice around the country.

An article published in 2014 by the Congress for the New Urbanism²⁶ highlighted 15 different US cities that are candidates for the removal of their mid-century era downtown highways. Buffalo, along with several other 'rust belt' cities made the list. Neighboring Rochester, NY not only made the list, but in fact has gone on to remove portions of their 'Innerloop.' This project in particular has only expedited the conversation for I-190 in Buffalo. It proves that when new developments run into barriers of this nature, it is only a matter of time before a solution is found, and it isn't out of the question to completely remove the problem.

*"This project is repairing the urban fabric and restoring the street grid by knitting back together a section of the city that was previously separated," said Robert Stark, a Buffalo-based partner with CJS Architects, part of the project's planning team. These projects are always challenging, and there are a lot of players involved in making something like this happen," Stark said. "But this obviously shows it can be done, with a positive benefit to the entire city."*²⁷

If everything covered thus far establishes a case tight enough for the removal of a highway, creation of city new blocks, replacement of surface parking, and the addition of a new downtown stadium, then one question still remains: what happens to Orchard Park?

²⁵ The City Of Buffalo, *Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo*, Vol. 1 P. 16, 2003

²⁶ Congress for the New Urbanism, *2014 Freeways Without Futures*, www.cnu.org, 2014

²⁷ Mark Sommer, *Don't Think Buffalo Can Remove a Highway? Rochester Did*, The Buffalo News, 2018

For starters, it's important to understand the context of New Era Field, and how a Buffalo football stadium ended up twenty minutes outside of Buffalo. Before the Buffalo Bills joined the National Football League, they played in the American Football League, a smaller scale professional league that ultimately merged with the NFL in 1970. While members of the AFL, the Bills played their home games much closer to downtown, at War Memorial Stadium - also referred to as "the Rock Pile", on Dodge Street. When the NFL established seating capacity guidelines, War Memorial Stadium came up short, so then owner Ralph Wilson was forced to seek a new home for his football team. He explored options to completely relocate the Bills to a new city in a different state, but ultimately settled on a plot of land in Orchard Park, NY.

The project location was a compromise after a settlement was reached between Wilson and Erie County Legislature, who were originally proposing a stadium to be built in nearby Lancaster.²⁸ Placement of the stadium well outside city limits fell in line with a trend at the time of relying on new highways and the suburban boom to support sports franchises as satellites to the cities they once called home. The reversal of this trend still has not been completely realized, with renovations to stadiums like New Era Field making for easy stop gaps instead. Many NFL stadiums simply cannot fit within heavily developed, dense, urban areas and for that reason interest in moving teams downtown just isn't logical for those places. Buffalo finds itself in a unique situation in that regard, because due to the mishandling of downtown during the 20th century, Downtown Buffalo can make room for such a project - with extra room to boot. New Era Field is the sixth oldest stadium in the NFL, and as the Pegulas have made it known they intend to consider a move downtown, local officials have been pushing for such a move. Part of the reason why is the economic impact a downtown stadium would have versus the economic impact New Era Field has had.²⁹

The question for Buffalo is not just, 'where can the stadium fit?' it is also, 'what can be done for the community that has come to rely on games at New Era Field?' Consideration of the Bill's current setup must go beyond whether or not a fanbase accustomed to 'tailgating' could adapt to a new urban setting without a sea of surface parking, and really focus on how hurt the community of Orchard Park would be if the Bills left.

A list of criteria for this scenario should be established to address the concerns of the game-dependent businesses in Orchard Park. Preferential consideration and financial incentive should be given to said businesses when seeking tenants for any new commercial space adjacent to the new stadium. This would give opportunity for those businesses to grow, but also for new businesses to take advantage of what could be newly empty storefronts in Orchard Park. Whichever criteria are chosen, they should be integral to any comprehensive plan to move the stadium into Downtown.

²⁸ UPI, *Buffalo Making Efforts to Retain Grid Franchise*, The Star News, 1971

²⁹ Kevin Riechard, *Best of 2910, #4: Buffalo Bills Study Stadium Options*, Football Stadium Digest, 2019

V. PRECEDENT STUDIES

GOLDEN ONE CENTER - SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

If there is a bastion of hope for the ideas put forth in this thesis, the Golden One Center in Sacramento might be it. Northern California and western New York may not have all that much in common geographically, but from a planning perspective, they have both found themselves treading up a similar stream in recent years. *"Four years ago, this place was dead...you could have thrown a bowling ball and it wouldn't have hit a soul."* described Sacramento Kings owner Vivek Ranadive. This characterization of Sacramento should strike a chord in the sensibilities of Buffalo residents.

The city of Sacramento, in partnership with Ranadive, took what was a desolate stretch of their city and in three years transformed a plot of land and with it, the local economy. "Downtown jobs increased 38% according to the Downtown Sacramento Partnership, a city economic development group. In the last year, 27 new stores have opened, and 23 others are scheduled to open this year. So much construction is happening that the city has decided to hire two dozen new employees to process applications and building permits."³⁰ This \$1 Billion downtown commons and arena project took its cues from the trend that is happening across the country. *The Arena District* in Columbus, Ohio, being the primary case study for the Sacramento group.³¹

The plot of land used to transform into the Golden One Center was a relic of the 1970s - an open air shopping plaza that was home to various shops, theaters and department stores, called "The Downtown Plaza" then later "The Downtown Commons." The plot changed ownership hands over the years, but as the businesses within faltered, it was realized that a new vision was needed for the entire district. In conjunction with the new \$507 million publicly owned Golden One Center, the commons and adjacent properties were transformed into a concept that is becoming the norm in areas surrounding downtown arenas: entirely revised city blocks, with new opportunities for housing, commerce, and public spaces.

*"The renaissance of The Kay over the last decade can be largely attributed to the city's implementation of the K Street Redevelopment Zone which was employed to create a mixed-use live/work entertainment zone along the corridor...The City of Sacramento saw vacant, blighted buildings along K Street as an opportunity to establish an energetic entertainment epicenter that would encourage employees to live in the area and form a vibrant urban core that allowed for 18 hour economic cycles."*³²

³⁰ Keith Schneider, *Welcome to the Neighborhood: America's Sports Stadiums Are Moving Downtown*, The New York Times, 2018

³¹ Nationwide Realty Investors, *Arena District - Downtown Columbus*, www.arenadistrict.com, 2020

³² Jon Lang, *An Inside Look Into What's Happening on Sacramento's Downtown K Street*, Turton Commercial Real Estate, www.turtoncommercial.wordpress.com, 2015

ROGERS PLACE - EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Downtown Edmonton does not have all that much in common with Downtown Buffalo, from a historical standpoint - or even from a contemporary from an economic standpoint - however, from the perspectives of culture, sports, climate, and recent need for 'design intervention,' there are some logical parallels to be drawn. One of the reasons that Edmonton is not currently in the same economic situation as Buffalo, is that it did not endure the nearly century-long economic decline like Buffalo did. With nearly 14k downtown residents as of today, Edmonton's metropolitan area far exceeds Buffalo in that regard. What the development of Rogers Place in Edmonton can do for Buffalo is serve as a template for the design aspirations of a new stadium and show how successful it can be.

Where the two cities can really find commonality is their cultural investment in sports as an institution. As Buffalonians are with the Bills, Sabres, Bandits, and Bisons, so too are Edmontonians with their Oilers, Eskimos, Oil Kings, and Rush. Woven into the economic and social fabric of each community, sports can act as a launching pad for any infrastructural investment. Much like the Pegulas have found success adapting vacant parcels in Downtown Buffalo to become mixed-use sports facilities, HOK was tasked with a similar challenge in Edmonton.

*"One of the primary project challenges was connecting the arena to the ICE District and Edmonton's downtown. The design and planning team proposed extending the arena's footprint over the main thoroughfare—104 Avenue—to connect the two parcels of land identified for development. This elevated, multipurpose entryway, dubbed Ford Hall, is enhanced by street-level commercial development."*³³

When the deal was struck for Daryl Katz, owner of the Edmonton Oilers, to build this new facility, it included specific criteria for how the facility would serve the community. The agreement was a list of criteria that both Katz and the city of Edmonton would be cooperatively responsible for. The criteria, listed on Edmonton's municipal web page³⁴, are as follows:

- Protect the city's interests
- Do not increase current municipal property taxes
- Sustains team in Edmonton
- Provide public infrastructure as a catalyst for downtown revitalization
- Contribute financially to adjacent developments
- Build a light rail connection to the arena
- Build Pedestrian walkways through the arena, linking adjacent public spaces
- Government funding grant for assorted related projects

³³ Arch20, *Rogers Place and The ICE District*, via HOK, www.arch20.com, 2020

³⁴ City of Edmonton, *Building Rogers Place: The Agreement*, www.edmonton.ca, 2020

Because Canada has a much different governmental policy than the US, and tends to be much more progressive - in general terms - these specific criteria may not be realistic for a city like Buffalo. That being said, as a whole, the Rogers Place project embodies the spirit of what Buffalo should strive for in a partnership with the Pegulas to re-shape downtown through the use of pro sports as a developmental instrument for economic growth.

Vi. CASE STUDY & URBAN ANALYSIS

THE DISTRICT DETROIT VS BUFFALO'S SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

What The District Detroit offers Buffalo is a dose of reality and forewarning, along with what could be a potential roadmap to success. Although Little Caesars Arena is already constructed, and has won awards for its design, the grander 50-block plan that was initially proposed by the Ilitch family to form the entire District Detroit has yet to be realized. Despite that, the original vision was very similar to what is possible for the Cobblestone District in Downtown Buffalo.

*"[it was pitched as a] sprawling sports and entertainment development, unveiled in July 2014...anchored by a new hockey arena that would be surrounded by what were branded as five distinct new neighborhoods to be created concurrently. They would be robust new residential, retail and office developments. 'The District Detroit will be one of the most unique and exciting places in the country to live,' said Ilitch, scion of the powerful billionaire family that owns the Little Caesars pizza chain along with a casino and the Detroit Tigers and Detroit Red Wings."*³⁵

A dissection of the similarities and differences between where Detroit was prior to District Detroit and where Buffalo is right now will be the goal of this case study, more so than the relative success or failure of District Detroit, from Detroit's perspective. Detroit currently has a downtown population of around 10k, which is about 10x the population of Downtown Buffalo. This tells a story of the historical differences between the two cities, above all else. Detroit has always been a larger city than Buffalo, and with that comes higher stakes, bigger projects, and potentially harsher criticisms than may arise in a smaller city like Buffalo. The most valuable comparisons between the two cities relate to the state of each city's urban fabric, prior to each project, irrespective of scale.

At their cores, Detroit and Buffalo share similarly unique grid patterns. Detroit's grid was designed by Augustus Bevroort in 1805 as a "hub and spoke system modelled after Washington D.C., and Versailles, France."³⁶ Like Buffalo, this type of grid pattern allows for grand vistas of the center city as one travels along each spoke of the wheel. Detroit saw its city develop organically along these veins, and in its heyday was block after block of functional street level interfaces. Unfortunately, like Buffalo, Detroit also saw its urban density erode over time, as buildings and blocks were lost for one reason or another, and parking spaces began to outnumber residents. In the early 20th century, developer Max Goldberg began a process of building downtown parking lots in order to charge motorists fees, as a business model, which landed him the nickname the "Parking Lot King."³⁷ Between the 1950s and the 1980s, Detroit underwent the same

³⁵ Kirk Pinho & Bill Shea, *Is The District Detroit Delivering?*, Crain's Detroit Business - Home and Real Estate, 2019

³⁶ Louis Alguilar, *Four Ways History Shapes Downtown Detroit Today*, Part 1, The Detroit News, 2019

³⁷ Louis Alguilar, *Four Ways History Shapes Downtown Detroit Today*, Part 4, The Detroit News, 2019

fateful makeovers that Buffalo and many other cities did: highways and urban renewal. Having spent the previous two centuries cultivating an organic community along the 1805 Bevroot plan, when the highways came in, out went the residents. Swaths of previously bustling neighborhoods were cleaved away, and the remaining portions were left to contend with their new neighbors: highways, parking lots, and high-rise buildings.³⁸

Before The District Detroit was proposed, Downtown Detroit, like Buffalo, was seeing a transition period begin. After it had been long agreed upon that the city needed a new vision, small-scale investments began to pop up - hinting that bigger investments could be on the horizon. Then entered the Ilitch family. Owners of the national restaurant chain Little Caesars, Mike and Marian Ilitch purchased the Detroit Red Wings in 1982. This began a decades long investment into the sports and entertainment of Detroit, including stadiums, arenas, and theaters. Similar to how the Pegulas have swooped into Buffalo to invest in sports and entertainment, the Ilitches were initially seen as a savior to the broken city. They made it known that it was their intention to use the beloved Red Wings as a pivot point for decades of reinvestment into downtown Detroit. The glow of hope around the Ilitch family did not last forever, though. As they began buying up lots around the city, questions began to surface about just how good an idea it was for an investor to sit on such a large stock of unused property.

“...while the late Mike Ilitch and his family get a lot of credit for reviving the south Corridor, it was only a few short years ago that their business practices helped break the area’s back. Starting in the late 1990s, Ilitch developed and executed a 15-year plan that critics call ‘dereliction by design,’ in which he quietly bought around 70 properties and left them to rot. That drove down land value and created a redevelopment dead zone that Detroit quickly degenerated around, thus allowing Ilitch to buy up more property for cheap.”³⁹

On Top of these issues, the Ilitch family also receives criticism for utilizing taxpayer money to fund their projects. However, this is not all that uncommon of a practice for sports owners. Historically, sports teams have relied heavily on government subsidies to fund new stadiums and arenas, usually with the promise of bringing new jobs and other beneficial economic opportunities to the area. This practice will likely remain the norm, but in the case of Detroit, where the Ilitch family sat on hundreds of acres of undeveloped property for years, there is a genuine concern for how that practice affects an area long term.

A 2016 report by Brookings cautioned municipalities, and the entire sports industry, about relying on public money to fund sports facilities. It concluded that government subsidies provided through public funding pay back very little in economic benefit to the communities themselves, especially under the

³⁸ Angie Schmitt, *7 Photos Show How Detroit Hollowed Out During The Highway Age*, Streetsblogusa, 2014

³⁹ Tom Perkins, *How The Ilitches Used ‘Dereliction By Design’ To Get Their New Detroit Arena*, Detroit Metro Times, 2017

traditional model of standalone arenas in suburban areas⁴⁰. This falls in line with the renewed practice of sports owners moving their facilities back into urban areas. It seems investors are getting the message and are attempting to take the holistic approach of creating larger, more sustainable arena and stadium projects, rather than single purpose, standalone facilities, in seas of surface parking.

While the criticisms of the Ilitch family in Detroit are prominent, for the most part, Buffalo seems to be on board with the development plans of the Pegulas. This may be due to how many of the derelict properties in Buffalo have been sitting undeveloped for quite some time, independent of anything the Pegulas have done. The prospect of a developer coming in and reimagining these areas may be an easier pill to swallow for Buffalonians than it has been for Detroiters.

“Currently, commercial developers are racing to buy up property in the Cobblestone District with the goal of eventually selling that property at above market value if the Bills commit to building a downtown stadium. Specifically, Ellicott Development and its affiliate companies own 20% of 165 properties in the district, while the Pegulas also own a significant portion of the available properties.”⁴¹

At first glance of a satellite map, one may draw the conclusion that Detroit's downtown highways cause a similar disruption in its urban fabric that the highways in Buffalo do. However, while Buffalo's downtown highways are a raised system, with underpasses, Detroit's system is a sunken system which allows for the city grid to pass over it uninterrupted at street level. This is a key difference between what ails Buffalo and what ailed Detroit. The difference this makes on the ground level is stark. While Detroit's highway underpasses cause a sizable break in the pedestrian interface, it does not cause a visual deterrent upon approach. Maybe the biggest impact of Buffalos overpasses is the way they block visual connection between the areas on either side.

It is clear that, unlike Detroit, Buffalo does in fact have a highway issue that it needs to solve before it can approach the level of success that District Detroit has seen. If a solution can be found for the highway and there can once again be direct connections between the city center and the new stadium, then Detroit can offer insight to what can become of empty lots that line the perimeter of a city. A conclusion that can be drawn from the examples set by Detroit, Edmonton, and Sacramento is that these projects demand scale and scope. It is not enough to simply drop a sports facility on an empty urban lot - there has to be a comprehensive plan for adjacencies. While Buffalo is unique in comparison to the precedent provided, in each case there are parallels to be drawn and insights to be gained. If the various solutions can be drawn from and stitched together, then there should be no doubt that a feasible plan can be adopted.

⁴⁰ Alexander K. Gold et. al, *Why The Federal Government Should Stop Spending Billions on Private Sports Stadiums*, www.Brooksing.edu, 2016

⁴¹ Brandon Snyder, *Could the Buffalo Bills Stampede Into a Downtown Stadium?*, Wordpress, 2019

Vii. FRAMEWORK TO A DESIGN SOLUTION

Reinvigorating the Sports and Entertainment District will require a phased approach that has specific objectives, and an order to follow. All things considered, reaching the objective of a viable downtown requires a concise starting point, and for Buffalo this must be to address the problematic highway. Only from there can real regrowth begin. Once the I-190 highway structures are removed, then the design for reconnecting the two main downtown nodes can begin.



The framework for this project in its entirety can be summarized in its simplest form as follows:

- Objective 1: Reconnection
 - Highway removal
 - Subdivision of surface parking and reclaimed highway footprint
 - Tie new routes into existing Downtown
 - Relocate mitigated surface parking and introduce new forms of public transit
- Objective 2: 'Destination' Commercial Development
 - New stadium and revised Sports and Entertainment District
 - Integrated civic space in and around stadium

- Mixed-use adjacencies along main veins of district expansion
 - Incentivize transplanting of Orchard Park stadium-dependent businesses
- Objective 3: New Complete Street-Compliant Neighborhoods
 - Housing closest to main veins to be mixed-use/insula-type
 - All streets to follow The Green Code and Complete Streets guidelines
 - Public spaces and pocket parks will fill in along main connections to Downtown

Architectural design motifs for this project can be sampled from an array of precedent, and need not be defined by this framework, other than the functional demand of the proposal outlined above. In other words, what the stadium looks like, what the materials used are, or what the size, shape, and orientation of the buildings will be, are not integral to this proposal - but will need to be a major consideration once the true schematic design phase begins, considering the context of Downtown Buffalo's history. Ideally, a contextual sampling of both historic and contemporary Buffalo architecture, and would be left to the designers, but be a collaborative with representatives of the community. The images below offer only placeholder examples of precedent in similar urban contexts of other cities.



D LITTLE CAESARS ARENA - DETROIT, MI - COURTESY: THE NHL



E MONTREAL, QUE MIXED USE STREET - COURTESY: UNTAPPED CITIES

Image D shows the concourse of Little Caesars Arena – a space that is intended to mimic the feel of a downtown street with storefronts on both sides. This provides the contextual framework for the proposed outdoor hybrid space of the new Downtown Buffalo stadium. The main difference is that in the Detroit example, the entire space remains private and indoors – whereas the proposed design would be an outdoor space that is public domain before, during and after events at the stadium.

Image E represents a generic example of a mixed-use street within a dense urban context – which is the goal of the proposed area immediately surrounding the new stadium.

HIGHWAY REMOVAL

The first step of this process is to define the portion of the I-190 highway that is causing the most disconnection between the two nodes, then conducting a traffic analysis to determine the most strategic locations to disburse highway traffic through the existing city boulevards. There are several options to consider, which would have different levels of immediate impact on the current flow of traffic. As shown in the diagrams below, Options A, B, and C all have varying approaches to this solution.



Option A offers a bypass of the city center by removing the vein that severs the two nodes. This option also proposes adding a new vein just south of both nodes, stemming from the southern portion of the existing skyway. This modification to the highway allows current highway traffic to continue at normal speeds and volume but reroutes it around the city rather than through it, as it currently does.

Option B proposes a full removal of the portion of I-190 that severs the two nodes, but also proposes a full removal of the skyway. This option would completely stop all thru traffic that currently routes into and around the city. This may be the best overall solution, but it creeps outside the scope of this design and begins to address the skyway, which is in and of itself an entirely different project with its own issues and goals to address.

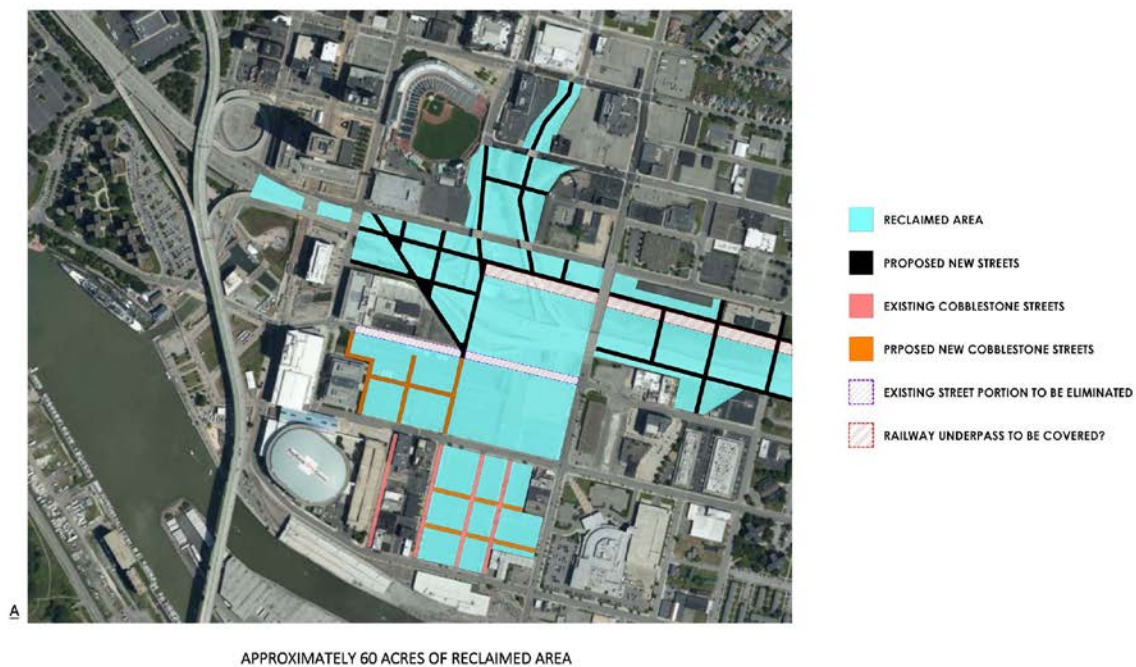
Option C proposes a hybrid of Options A and B, where the portion of the highway that severs the two nodes stops just west of the city center, but continues just east of the city center, as it currently does. The existing thru-traffic will be reduced to typical city street traffic along existing city blocks. In this option the skyway also remains intact to allow for existing thru traffic that currently uses that route to continue uninterrupted.

For the purposes of this design, it is recommended that Option C be preferred in order to improve the targeted conditions without creating new problems related to additional highways or complete disruption of tertiary routes, such as the skyway. An analysis of the impact of Option C vs the rest via a contracted traffic study will be the only way to know the definitive impacts of each option. However, a spatial analysis of the impact of Option C provides enough insight into how that option provides a net gain of both footprint and connectivity between the surrounding areas. As seen in the diagram below, there is a reclaimed footprint from the highway that is approximately 40 acres, but by removing the highway there is also a net gain of approximately 45 additional acres of surrounding area that is currently unusable, due to the way the highway currently lays over the historical city grid. This is the goal of Objective 1: *Reconnection*.



REPURPOSING OF VACANT SPACE

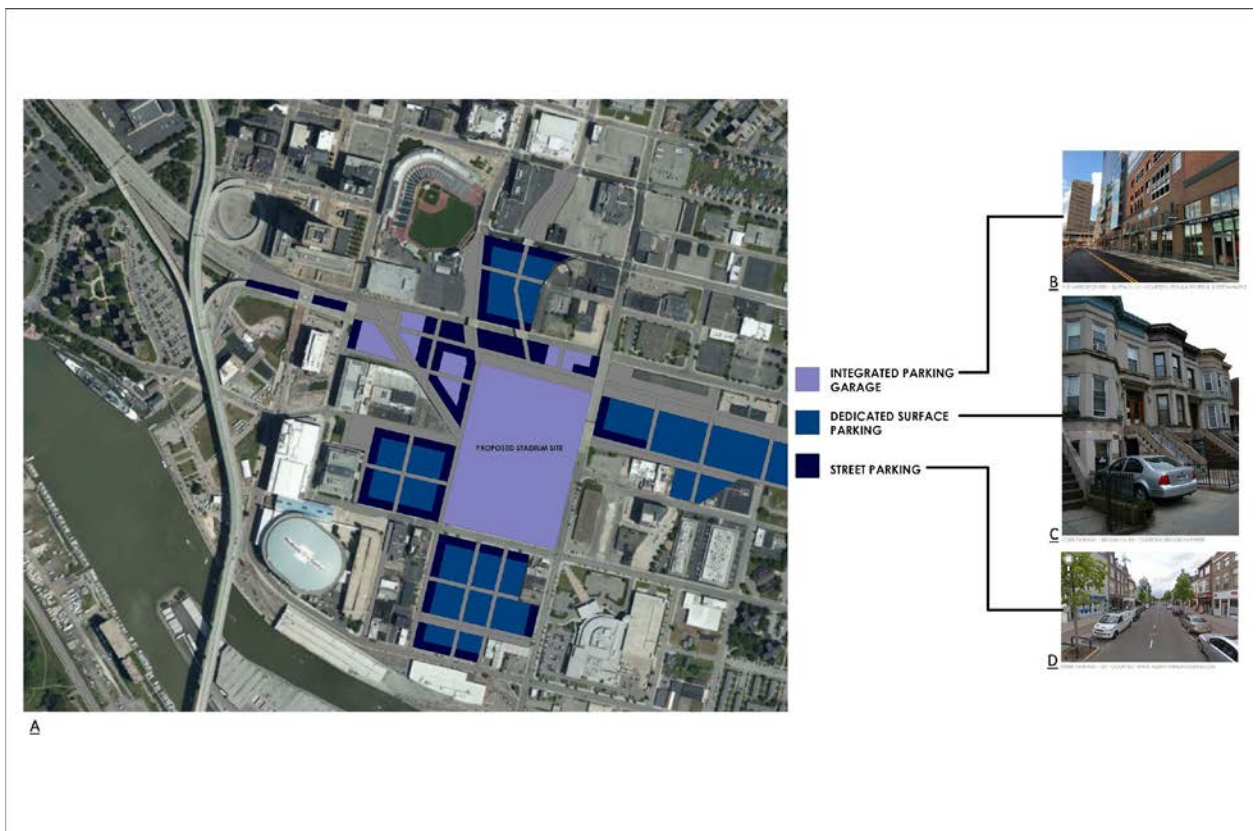
The net gain of this surface area is the catalyst to the redevelopment of the Sports and Entertainment District. What this allows is the subdivision of gained space and re-planning of city blocks, which will accommodate the proposal of new city buildings, and a new sports facility. As shown in the diagram below, once the subdivision accounts for new city streets to form new city blocks, there is a total/gross gain of approximately 60 acres of usable building footprint that can be portioned up into different building types.



The purpose of this design is not only to reclaim the highway footprint, but also to offer a framework for designing functional new city blocks that reconnect the two nodes currently severed by the highway footprint. The framework is not meant to be a proposal of a particular design character, or a specific volume of particular building types, rather, it is meant to be an outline of how the space available could be allocated to a general array of building types that research and precedent has shown to be viable in projects similar to this.

One of the major concerns for this type of development, that uses vacant - but available - street parking for new building footprint, is how to address parking for the increase of people with a simultaneous

subtraction of parking. This framework outlines how the parking situation could be mitigated with various integrated parking solutions, as seen in the diagram below.

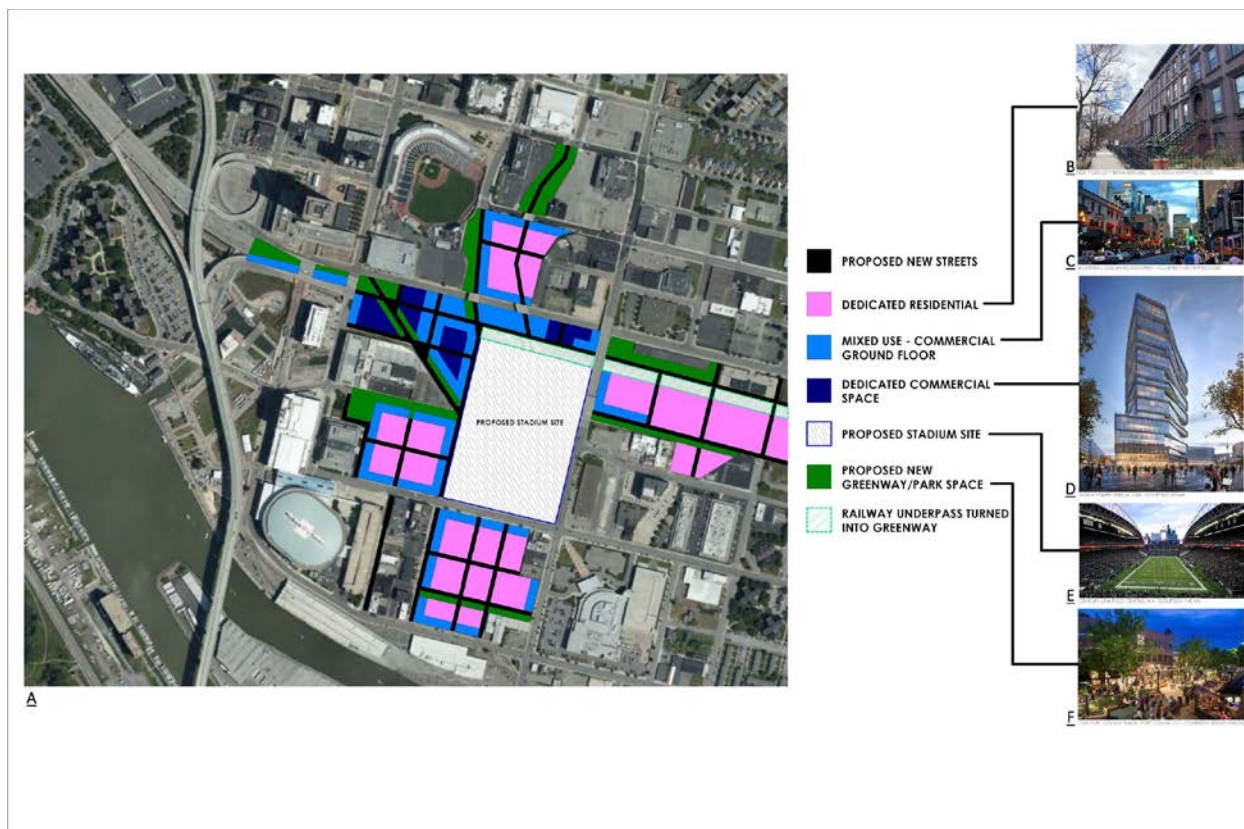


This solution to parking demand is no different than many contemporary downtown developments and is also like historic solutions that incorporate access to public transportation into the selling points of living downtown. Of course, the variation/application of the different parking options would heavily depend on the specific housing types chosen for each location. Again, this framework is simply a general guide, and the final context of the proposed design would depend on community-based decisions that incorporate housing viability studies as well as commercial demand.

NEW DESIGN PROPOSAL

The diagram below outlines a general layout of spaces that would accommodate the targeted location of a new stadium while also suggesting how the application of The Green Code and the Complete Streets criteria could be achieved in an area that blends commercial and residential spaces effectively. This brings us into Objective 2: *Destination Commercial Development*.

One of the major weaknesses of downtown Buffalo is the lack of draw from surrounding areas. A function of the highway is to bring commerce away from the city - which historically has been the catalyst for suburban commercial sprawl, such as strip malls and standalone retail, but it hurt the existing commercial presence in the Sports and Entertainment District. As it stands, there has been a small influx of commercial adaptive reuse projects in and around the Cobblestone District, which has proven to many that there is at least some demand for more commerce in the area. This, in conjunction with the addition of several new build commercial projects in the area has only aided the argument for more development.



This design framework proposes a significant influx of brand-new commercial space that can embrace an array of business types. As shown in the diagram above, there is an emphasis on street level commercial retail space, even on blocks that are dedicated to residential use on the upper levels. Only on plots closest to the border of the city center are dedicated commercial spaces proposed - an intentional

strategy which represents a gradient of use-types, which would have been seen had the city been allowed to develop organically, without disruption of the highway.

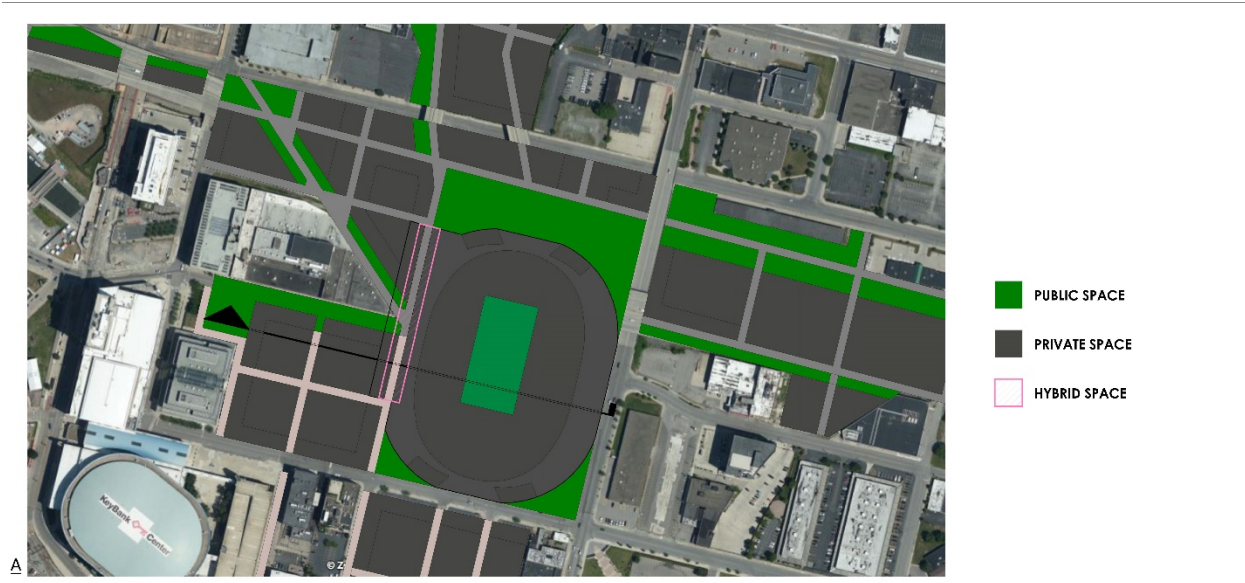
Obviously, with the focal point of this design being a giant sports stadium, integrating residential and small-scale commercial space into the immediate surrounding areas is not without challenges, which brings us to Objective 3: New Complete Street-Compliant Neighborhoods. As is outlined in the precedent for such projects, the most important element to functionality and sustainability of this type of city-space is the presence of residents. This is not a new concept - it is how cities all around the world have developed organically around sports facilities. They become a functional member of the neighborhood, much more so than the suburban or rural facilities that became popular after the installation of major highway systems.

The missing force to drive a substantial economic uptick has historically been the presence of residential infrastructure in the downtown Buffalo area. However, according to the 2018 housing market study there is a demand for downtown housing that as of 2017 was on the rise. "In 2017, downtown produced 262 units, just under the current demand of 281 units, annually. This is a significant increase in both production and demand since 2011. Additionally, vacancy within downtown apartments stands at just 4.2%, well below the industry standard of 5% for a healthy rental market. These figures indicate that the economic development efforts are effective and the need in the market is being satisfied."⁴²

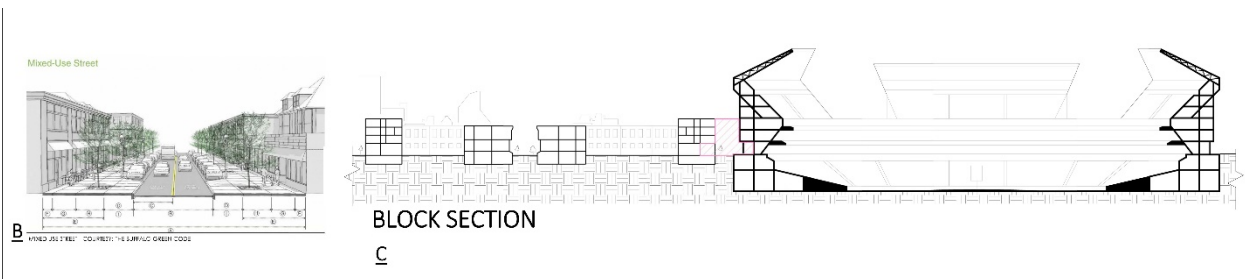
This proposal adds approximately 700,000 square feet of new residential footprint, which could be divided into a combination of flat-style insula apartments or single-family townhomes. Based on data from the 2018 report referenced above, Buffalo had a total of 1,591 downtown units, with 51 new units sold in 2017 alone. This proposal could add upwards of 2,000 more (plus), depending on unit types and building heights.

Integral to this proposal is the concept of complete streets. Generally speaking, this is a design outline that describes the relationship between commercial, residential, and public space. Picture, if you will, the different neighborhoods in cities like Manhattan and Montreal, or European cities like Berlin or Copenhagen. In city centers, there is an emphasis on street level commercial space along main routes, but a greater emphasis on residential structures along the side street grid lines. It may be difficult to imagine this for the Sports and Entertainment District with the current infrastructure, but as shown in the diagrams above, the available space is capable of embodying that spatial variation with subdivision of the space into new city blocks.

⁴² Buffalo Niagara Partnership & BUDC, *Downtown Buffalo: Looking Ahead With A Clearer View*, 2018, P. 4



The challenge of providing complete streets directly adjacent to a new downtown stadium requires imagining hybrid space - not unlike that outlined in the precedent of District Detroit and Rogers Place. Hybrid spaces, in this sense, act as a transitional cooperative between public and private space uses. For example, in traditional stand-alone stadiums, once the event ends the gates are locked and the vendors close business until the next game. This framework suggests that stadium vendors should be full time vendors at street level, and only double as event vendors during events. The exact programmatic layout for such a business could be conceptualized in different ways - but would not be unprecedented in general. The diagram above illustrates (in pink) how this somewhat interstitial public/private space would work using section views of entire blocks adjacent to the stadium.



In the section cuts above, you can see how the proposed design (right) reflects the proportions provided in the Complete Streets guidelines (left). The indoor/outdoor, public/private hybrid space (in pink) creates a sense of place that would be unique to Buffalo, but would not sacrifice the character of the existing charm of the Cobblestone district, given the proposal to expand the literal cobblestone streets into this area.

Viii. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The emphasis of this framework is entirely community driven. It is the simple idea that no matter what, any space within a community should be dedicated to serving the community itself, one way or another. If it is a 30-story office building, then it should have street level public interface so that it does not waste valuable streetfront commercial access. This sort of space could be used for a grocery store, or a car dealership, or a trade shop - whatever it is, it should serve the community directly, and not be wasted.

This framework to a design solution for Downtown Buffalo illustrates the severity of the impact I-190 has had on the southern portion of the city. It serves to correct this problem by working backwards to mimic a point in time when Buffalo had a unified and cohesive city grid that could have grown organically into what this design proposes. The fact that Buffalo is already on the rise in terms of new commercial development as well as increased residential demand only serves to support this proposal. Considering the Buffalo Bills are currently seeking a new downtown home, and are owned by developers who have already invested in new infrastructure in the Sports and Entertainment District, all the reason in the world exists to piggy-back on this as an opportunity to finally address the highway removal and give the Cobblestone District the long overdue revitalization it deserves as a historic area of Buffalo.

This proposal may just be a framework, but it encourages already established standalone objectives of the city of Buffalo to come together in a single attempt to solve multiple problems at once while achieving a common goal - to help make Downtown Buffalo the beautiful community it was originally envisioned to be by Joseph Ellicott and Frederick Olmsted over one hundred years ago.

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